

Mine areas come clean

Reclamation funds used to restore sites

By Allen Blair

Of The Daily Independent

HITCHINS — Where once leftover coal and dust covered a small patch of ground near Hitchins, grass now grows.

"The reclamation is finished there, and now residents have an opportunity to see it after it's done," said Dick Prelopski, spokesman for the Kentucky Department for Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement.

The patch of ground is the old Joyce Tipple-Prichard Mining Co. property along Ky. 1.

In May, state mining officials, the federal Office of Surface Mining and local leaders gathered there to break ground on its clean-up, paid for under the Abandoned Mine Land (AML) program.

All active mines pay federal production fees that are collected in an AML fund; then, that money is distributed to states for reclamation work.

The Hitchins site was part of a project of three — totaling 27 acres — that began under a \$228,000 contract with C&K Contracting Co. of Morehead.

Crews graded the land to match the surrounding landscape, then replaced coal sediment and other refuse with fresh soil.

The second site — at Hurricane Hollow next to Ky. 773 — contains two abandoned sediment structures in deteriorating condition.

Crews have been stabilizing both and isolating them with diversion channels to ensure mudflow won't endanger adjacent property.

The third site, another abandoned tipple, is about 5.5 acres on the north side of Ky. 7 at Leon. Leftover steel and concrete structures, as well as coal waste, have been removed.

Hitchins was the first to finish, and will serve as a backdrop to a completion ceremony set for 1 p.m. Wednesday with state, federal and local officials, Prelopski said.

THE DAILY INDEPENDENT, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2005, PAGE 1

complete, said Steve Hohmann, director of the Kentucky Division of Abandoned Mine Lands.

Crews anticipate finishing it within the next two weeks, if the weather remains dry, Hohmann said.

Once completely reclaimed, the land can be used by the landowner, he said.

Under the AML program, state or federal agencies do not gain control of land, they only clean it up.

"We've eliminated a hazard, whether it was a pollution or safety hazard ... and the land can be used for whatever the landowner chooses to use it for now," Hohmann said.

In many cases around the state, such sites can be developed for homes or business, he added.

At the May groundbreaking ceremony in Hitchens, local officials and neighbors commented that they were glad to see cleanup work begin at the old "eyesore."

Now, what's been reclaimed can be considered changed from hazardous to usable, from a liability to an asset, Hohmann said.

.

ALLEN BLAIR can be reached by phone at (606) 326-2657 or by e-mail at ablair@dailyindependent.com.

.

Mine Money

Surface mining laws provide for the restoration of lands mined and abandoned or left inadequately restored before Aug. 3, 1977. Production fees collected from coal producers at all active coal mining operations are deposited in the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund, which is used to pay the reclamation costs of abandoned mine land projects. For more information on the fund, visit <http://www.osmre.gov/> on the Internet.